Met Office

February 2012

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1981-2010.

UK overview

High pressure over Europe resulted in a very cold spell during the first 12 days with some sharp frosts and snowfalls, especially across England. Western Scotland and Northern Ireland were soon influenced by Atlantic airstreams and this milder weather had spread to all parts by the 13th. Thereafter, these westerly airstreams dominated giving generally mild weather, occasionally very mild in the last 10 days, with cloud most frequent in the west and any rain restricted to north-western areas.

The UK mean temperature was 0.5 °C above the 1981-2010 average, but varied from about 0.5 °C below normal across southern England and parts of East Anglia to some 2.0 °C above in Northern Ireland and northern Scotland. Most of England, Wales and eastern Scotland were much drier than average. In many eastern and southern counties of England and parts of eastern Scotland only about a third of the normal amount fell. Over England it was the driest February since 1998. Sunshine amounts varied from above normal over East Anglia and other parts of eastern England, to well below in Northern Ireland and the western fringes of Scotland.

A maximum temperature of 18.7 °C was recorded at Coleshill (Warwickshire) on the 23rd. A minimum temperature of -15.6 °C was recorded at Holbeach (Lincolnshire) early on the 11th. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 on the 21st, 100.6 mm of rain fell at Wastwater (Cumbria). A wind gust of 74 mph was recorded on Fair Isle on the 24th. At 0900 on the 5th a snow depth of 16 cm was measured at Malham Tarn (North Yorkshire) and Buntingford (Hertfordshire).

Weather impacts

Cold weather during the first 12 days brought sharp frosts, icy roads and some snow, especially to the eastern half of England. Late on the 4th, several centimetres of snow fell widely across central and eastern England with over 12 cm in places. This resulted in travel disruption overnight and into the 5th, notably cancellation and delays to flights from Heathrow and lengthy delays to traffic on routes such as the M25 and M40. On the 9th, freezing rain fell across northern England causing treacherous conditions on roads and pavements. About 100 road accidents were reported from Cumbria, and hospital A&E departments dealt with hundreds of falls on icy pavements. Further snow fell across central and eastern England later on the 9th with difficult driving conditions. The continuing very low temperatures forced the postponement of sports fixtures during the weekend 11th / 12th, including some football and rugby matches and horse race meetings.

A government 'drought summit' on the 20th drew attention to the continuing lack of rainfall across most of East Anglia, the Midlands and South-east England. Further counties across these regions were added to the list of those suffering drought conditions declared last summer.

A very mild westerly airstream towards the end of the month brought unusually high temperatures but plenty of low cloud and fog to some south-western areas, with delays and cancellations to flights to the Channel Islands on the 23rd and 24th.

England diary of highlights

An intense area of high pressure over northern Europe resulted in a cold spell during the first 12 days. There were some sharp frosts and snowfalls, especially across central and eastern counties. Thereafter, Atlantic airstreams dominated with generally mild weather, occasionally very mild in the last 10 days, the cloud most frequent in the west and any rain restricted to the north-west.

The mean temperature was 0.2 °C below the 1981-2010 average. It was much drier than normal across most of England, especially in many eastern and southern counties where only about a third of the average amount fell. It was the driest February since 1998 generally. East Anglia and other eastern counties enjoyed a relatively sunny month, but it was duller towards the north-west coast.

1st to 3rd:

A very cold easterly airstream resulted in daytime temperatures rising no higher than 3 to 4 °C in most areas, with the west generally brightest. By the 3rd, lighter winds allowed the cold to intensify, with -12.4 °C recorded at South Newington (Oxfordshire) overnight on 3rd/4th.

4th to 6th:

During the weekend of 4th/5th, a band of rain, sleet and snow moved eastwards. Early on 4th, parts of the north-west saw freezing rain, with some glazed surfaces forming for a time before milder air turned the wintry mix to rain in western parts. Further east, many areas had their first significant snowfall of the winter, with 5 to 10 cm lying quite widely in central and eastern parts. The snow eventually cleared eastwards on 5th, with daytime temperatures staying around 0 °C in eastern counties.

7th to 12th:

Cold continental air dominated conditions in the east, with lying snow helping to maintain the low temperatures. Further west it was often cloudier and much milder, with fronts becoming slow-moving, bringing significant ice at times on the boundary between the mild and cold conditions. Most spells of rain and snowfall were light. The 9th saw a modest fall of snow from Yorkshire southwards through the Midlands before pressure again rose. The lowest temperatures of the winter were recorded early on 11th, falling below -12 °C widely in eastern counties and to -15.6 °C at Holbeach (Lincolnshire).

13th to 17th:

The cold conditions left south-eastern areas on 13th, with milder air spreading down from the north-west. This brought a relatively mild, benign spell of weather to all parts, with maximum temperatures widely exceeding 10 °C. Northern and western areas were often cloudy with occasional rain and drizzle, whilst the best of cloud breaks were to the south and east.

18th to 19th:

Fronts moved down from the north, with northerly winds bringing wintry showers to northern parts. Elsewhere conditions were largely clear and cold, with a return of widespread overnight frosts. During 19th, a ridge of high pressure over the Atlantic with west or south-westerly winds brought in milder air.

20th to 29th:

The final third of the month saw often mild or very mild conditions with generally westerly winds. Frontal systems mainly brought rain or showers to northern and, to some extent, western areas. The 20th, in particular, was wet across the north-west with over 40 mm in the north Pennines and 100.6 mm at Wastwater (Cumbria). Large amounts of cloud, with sea fog and widespread hill fog characterised this period, especially in the west. North-eastern areas generally fared best for brightness throughout. The 23rd in particular was a very mild day, with some sunshine across central and eastern parts lifting temperatures to 17 °C; Coleshill (Warwickshire) recorded 18.7 °C making this the warmest February day since 1998. A significant number of

stations recorded their highest February temperature on record. The exceptionally mild conditions were repeated on 28th, with temperatures around 14 °C east of the Pennines and reaching 17.4 °C at Durham

Wales diary of highlights

An intense area of high pressure over northern Europe resulted in a cold spell during the first 12 days, with some sharp frosts and hill snow. Thereafter, Atlantic airstreams dominated with generally mild weather, particularly in the last 10 days. It was often cloudy, particularly in the west, but with little rain.

The mean temperature was 0.2 °C above the 1981-2010 average. It was drier than average, with typically half the normal rainfall but only around a third of normal in the far south-east. Sunshine amounts were close to average generally, but a little below average towards the north-west.

1st to 3rd:

A mainly dry and sunny but very cold start to the month with severe night frosts, the temperature falling to -8.1 °C at Pembrey Sands (Carmarthenshire) early on 2nd and -11.3 °C at Sennybridge (Powys) early on 3rd.

4th to 6th:

It remained cold but with some brief less cold periods, even mild at times in the west. During the 4th, rain, sleet and some hill snow moved in, the rain freezing on very cold surfaces to give some very icy conditions. Freezing fog was slow to clear in some areas through 5th and 6th.

7th to 11th:

A return to mainly dry but very cold weather, with widespread night frosts, lingering freezing fog, especially in the east, but also some wintry showers. However, there were also some spells of sunshine, especially on 7th to 9th. From 10th, further cloudy periods with outbreaks of rain, especially in the north and west, whilst the south was brighter but very cold again.

12th to 19th:

The cold spell lost its grip from the 12th as milder air spread in from the north-west. This brought low cloud, mist, fog and drizzle at times, but there were also some drier periods with bright spells, especially to the south and east of high ground, leading to above average temperatures. On 18th, however, a band of rain moved southwards, with colder air following. A return to slightly colder conditions on 19th with night frosts and showers, these mainly of rain.

20th to 26th:

Mild, occasionally very mild, conditions set in, albeit with occasional night frosts. There was a good deal of cloud at times, especially in western areas, with mist, hill fog and drizzle. However, there were also some brighter spells with sunshine, especially in eastern areas.

27th to 29th:

Exceptionally mild conditions ended the month. A good deal of cloud kept night-time temperatures above freezing and some bright or sunny spells lifted daytime temperatures well above average, reaching 14.0 °C at Hawarden Airport (Flintshire) on 28th and 14.5 °C at Usk (Monmouthshire) on 29th.

Scotland diary of highlights

After a cold, fine start, for most of the month there was a westerly component to the airstreams over Scotland. These brought generally mild weather, especially in the last 10 days. Cloud and rain were most frequent in the

west, whilst sheltered eastern areas were mainly dry and recorded some unusually high temperatures at times.

The mean temperature was 1.7 °C above the 1981-2010 average, making it the mildest February since 1998 and one of the mildest on record. It was drier than average across most of central and eastern Scotland, especially from the Lothians to Aberdeenshire where only about a third of the normal amount fell. Rainfall totals were close to average in the west and the Northern Isles. It was a relatively dull month in the west, especially along the west coast and in the Western Isles, but sunshine totals were nearer normal along the east coast.

1st to 10th:

A frosty start on 1st and 2nd, with temperatures dropping to -7 °C on both nights in parts of the Highlands, but dry and sunny days followed. The 3rd again saw a frosty start after temperatures fell well below zero, with -10.9 °C at Braemar (Aberdeenshire) and -11.8 °C at Cromdale (Highland). It was a dry and sunny day, although rain reached the far west during the evening. This spread eastwards overnight resulting in a wet day on 4th with rain for most areas but snow for the higher ground. This cleared overnight to leave a slightly milder day on 5th with scattered showers in the north. The 6th and 7th were dry but cold days after a frosty start with temperatures down to -10 °C in parts of the central Highlands. There were long sunny spells although fog was slow to clear from parts of the Central Belt. The 8th was milder but wet after a frosty start for the north-west and dry and cold in southern and eastern areas. The 9th saw an area of freezing rain in Dumfries and Galloway in the morning but a dry day elsewhere and on 10th a band of patchy, light rain spread from the west.

11th to 19th:

The period 11th to 16th was more settled and generally dry, with the best of any sunshine in the east where temperature maxima reached 11 or 12 °C from 13th. On 16th rain in the north-west overnight gave way to showers, and it was dry and bright elsewhere. The 17th started dry and bright but rain, heavy at times, spread from the west during the day. This was persistent in the north-west, with 57.4 mm recorded at Cluanie Inn (Highland) and 70.6 mm at Achnagart (Highland) in the 24 hours ending 0900 on 18th. Turning much colder from the north-west as the rain spread southwards during the early hours of 18th, followed by showers of hail, sleet and snow. A frosty start on 19th with temperatures down to -10 °C in some Highland glens, and wintry showers at first in the north-west, but dry and sunny elsewhere.

20th to 29th:

Rain spread to all areas from the west on 20th and it turned milder in the south-westerly flow, the temperature reaching 13 °C along the Moray Firth. The 21st continued mild, especially in the east, but it was cloudy with rain at times, persistent in the higher parts of the west where over 40 mm was recorded (59.9 mm at Achnagart). This unsettled theme continued into 22nd and 23rd with strengthening winds but still very mild towards the east with 15.7 °C at Aboyne (Aberdeenshire) on 22nd and 15.9 °C at Dyce (Aberdeen) on 23rd. Fresh or strong north-west winds gave a bright day with scattered showers on 24th and again at first on 25th but cloud and rain spread south-eastwards through the day. Dry and cloudy with showers in the north-west on 26th, rain arriving from the west later which spread to all parts overnight. This cleared south-eastwards during the afternoon of 27th. The 28th and 29th were dry and cloudy but very mild, especially in the east, with the temperature reaching 17.2 °C at Dyce on 28th.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

After a cold, fine start, for most of the month there was a westerly component to the airstreams over Northern Ireland. These brought generally mild weather, especially in the last 10 days, with plenty of cloud but relatively little rain.

The mean temperature was 1.9 °C above the 1981-2010 average, making it the mildest February since 1998 and the fourth mildest on record. It was drier than average across southern areas, but totals were closer to

average further north. It was a dull month, with about half the normal amount of sunshine, and one of the dullest Februarys on record.

1st to 10th:

The 1st and 2nd were dry after frosty starts with plenty of sunny spells, although feeling chilly in the south-easterly wind. Temperatures fell inland to around -5 °C overnight 1st/2nd and 2nd/3rd with -8.1 °C recorded at Katesbridge (County Down) early on 3rd. A dry and bright day on 3rd although rain edged into western areas later in the afternoon. This moved into all areas overnight giving a wet but milder day on 4th, before clearing to leave a dull day on 5th with patchy rain spreading from the west during the morning. The 6th was cloudy but milder with some patchy light rain and fog for some areas, however the 7th saw more in the way of sunshine after fog cleared from some central areas. The 8th started dry but a band of rain spread from the west during the morning which continued into 9th giving a damp and dull day. The 10th was cloudy with scattered showers for southern areas.

11th to 20th:

The period 11th to 14th was generally mild, dry and cloudy. On morning of 15th a band of light rain spread westwards leaving behind a dry bright afternoon. The 16th saw some light rain or showers, continuing mild. On 17th rain spread from the south-west. Further rain on 18th left colder conditions with showers of hail and snow. Frosty start on 19th, then dry and bright throughout. Milder but mainly dull and wet on 20th.

21st to 29th:

The 21st was cloudy but mainly dry. The 22nd and 23rd saw a change to more unsettled conditions with strengthening winds and patchy rain but it was mild. Rain at first then fine and dry for remainder of 24th and 25th. After a dry start there was rain for much of 26th and early on 27th before it cleared south-eastwards during the afternoon. The 28th and 29th were dry, cloudy but mild..

Last updated: 2 August 2013

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